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Patriot Day Observance

Remarks as delivered by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Arlington National Cemetery, Thursday, September 11, 2003.

GEN. MYERS: Well, Secretary Rumsfeld, Secretary Wolfowitz, Secretary Armitage, Secretaries Roche, Johnson and Brownlee, fellow members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

I'd like to offer a special welcome to the families, friends and coworkers of those who lost their lives in the Pentagon on September 11th of 2001. And I think I see a number of crew members here from American Airlines, and it's great to have you here as well.

Patriots Day is a day to remember and honor them along with those who perished in Pennsylvania and New York, and to celebrate their lives and their legacies. The Nobel Prize-winning American author, William Faulkner, said, "I believe that man will not merely endure; he will prevail. He is immortal because he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."

The patriots who lost their lives in the Pentagon on 11 September embody that spirit. They are all heroes, not just because they gave their lives, but because they lived their lives as free Americans, and many in service to their country.

For the last two years, we've been a nation at war. Terrorists are trying to defeat what we Americans stand for -- for peace, freedom, tolerance and respect for human life. So we've undertaken an enormous effort to prevent them from spreading their creed of bloodshed, of hatred, of intolerance. This war on terrorism will be a long, hard struggle requiring our patience, our commitment and our will. Make no doubt about it, we are winning. And we're winning because we have a superb team of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marine, Coast Guardsmen and civilians who are 100 percent dedicated to winning this war. They've already made tremendous sacrifices. They're all patriots too, truly America's heroes.

Those who lost their lives in the Pentagon two years ago were aircrew members, innocent passengers, inside the Pentagon, officers and enlisted, active duty and reserve, civil servants, contractors. Some were just beginning their careers, and some had long -- a long record of honorable service. They were from all over the country and from a wide

range of background. But there were all dedicated to serving our nation and defending our freedoms. For those in the Pentagon, their hard work helped build the armed forces that we have today and paved the way for this important fight. And our success on this war on terrorism wouldn't have been possible without the sacrifices they made before September 11th, 2001.

In my view, it wasn't just their deaths that made them heroes. They're heroes because they lived lives of dedication to duty and service to country. We're proud to have known them, and they'll be sorely missed.

They won't be forgotten by their friends and families, who love them, or the co-workers, who respect them, or the nation that's so grateful for all they did. And in the memory of all those killed at the Pentagon two years ago, we will not merely endure; we will prevail.

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentleman, the Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Donald Rumsfeld.

SEC. RUMSFELD: Chairman Dick Myers, Chaplain Beltram, distinguished officials of the Department of Defense and other agencies of government, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, we are pleased you're here to join with the families and friends of those who lost their lives. Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, we thank you for your heroic service for our country. And families and friends of those deceased.

We gather here today to honor the heroes who sleep in these hills and commemorate the second annual observance of Patriot Day. But while the occasion is yet new, the concept is as old as our republic's founding ideals and the belief we cherish in our heart that freedom will triumph over tyranny. That is why patriots are so very important.

A patriot is one who loves his land, prizes its principles and cherishes its creed. A patriot so reveres the ideals of his home country that he is willing to lay down his life to ensure that those ideals endure.

Throughout our history, from the earliest days of our nation up to the present time, America has been blessed with patriots, men and women willing to give of themselves that this nation, and the freedom upon which it was founded, might live.

Just behind me and to my right, you can see through the trees the western wall of the building that was attacked two years ago this day. And in our mind's eye, we can see the arsenal of democracy that it represents. The men and women who died there that day were part of that arsenal, defending democracy as surely as any patriot on the front line.

And out there to my right, almost in a direct line with the monument that cradles the unknown remains of that day, we can glimpse the tip of the Washington Monument, pushing upwards towards heaven, and beyond it, the monuments to Jefferson, Lincoln, and other patriots of their time.

Straight ahead, beyond the open space that lies just beyond the trees, lie America's most recent patriots, the heroes of Afghanistan and Iraq. And I thank the other heroes of those

battles who are with us today, patriots every one. Each of those who have fallen gave their lives for something larger than themselves. They are important. They are important because without such patriots, freedom cannot exist. Freedom is the birthright of every American. We know that to be so. But it is the birthright as well of every person, a gift of God, given to all but denied to many by tyrants, by dictators who place their own power above human dignity and even human life. To those millions in those places, America is truly the light of liberty and the hope of the world. This is something we've always known to be true.

Thomas Paine said during the American Revolution, "America shall make a stand not for itself alone, but for the world." And from that day to this, the voices of other patriots in other times have rung out in support of human freedom. President Ronald Reagan telling Mr. Gorbachev to "tear down that wall." President Bush atop the rubble at the World Trade Center telling the terrorist that they would "hear from all of us soon."

They did hear from us, and the fight for freedom continues, because we know that if we do not fight the terrorists over there in Iraq, in Afghanistan and across the world, then we will have to face them here, and many more innocent men, women and children, as well as the patriots defending them, will perish. That's why we will prevail.

In 1834, Daniel Webster told the Senate, "God grants liberty only to those who love it and are always ready to guard and defend it." Fortunately for our nation, there continues to exist a long, unbroken line of patriotic defenders who rise up from this land we call America and take their place on freedom's walls. And so today, let us remember all those who died in New York, in Pennsylvania, here at the Pentagon, in the mountains of Afghanistan, in the deserts of Iraq. And let us recommit ourselves to their cause and to our mission: the triumph of freedom over tyranny.

And let this day always be a reminder to our nation and to the world why we fight in freedom's cause and why we must fight and win this global war on terror.

May God bless and protect our patriots, and may he continue to bless the United States of America.

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